

Theme & the SIFT Method of Literary Analysis

Using the SIFT method of literary analysis, you can “sift” through the parts in order to comprehend the whole. If you need a reminder of the definition of any of these literary terms, refer to your “Literary Terms” download.

S	Symbol: examine the title and text of story for symbolism
I	Images: identify images and sensory details
F	Figures of Speech: analyze figurative language and other devices
T	Tone and Theme: discuss how all devices reveal tone and theme

NAME OF STORY: _____ AUTHOR: _____

Respond to each prompt in complete sentences.

Symbol

Since symbols often hint at or develop theme, identify and explain any symbols you find in the text or the title of the story. Explain how and why the author uses those symbols. Don't forget that colors are also used in symbolism.

Imagery

Writers use language to create sensory impressions and to evoke specific responses to characters, objects, events, or situations in their works. The writer “shows” rather than “tells,” thus allowing the reader to participate in the experience more fully. Explain what imagery the author uses to help you see, hear, taste, smell, or feel what is happening. What effect is the author trying to convey with these images?

Figures of Speech

Writers form images by using figures of speech such as similes, metaphors, hyperbole, personification, etc. Find examples in the story and discuss how these figures of speech help to convey effect and meaning in the story.

Tone

Tone is the author's attitude, stated or implied, toward a subject. Some possible tones are pessimistic, optimistic, earnest, serious, bitter, humorous, and joy. A close examination of word choice, imagery, and detail reveals the narrator's attitude or tone and contributes to the reader's understanding. In a few words, explain the tone. And then give 2-3 examples from the text that support your choice of tone.

Theme

Finally, identify central themes. Remember: ask yourself what subjects (thematic words) emerge from your reading -- injustice, social protest, corruption, tradition, individuality, etc. List two thematic words, and then explain in one or two sentences what the author says about each of these subjects based on insights you gained from analyzing SIFT: symbolism, imagery, figurative language, and tone. Then you have identified a central theme.

1. Subject #1 (use a thematic word):

What does the author have to say about the subject?

1. Subject #2 (use a thematic word):

What does the author have to say about the subject?

What is theme?

The theme of a literary work is its underlying central idea or the generalization it communicates about life. The theme expresses the author's opinion or raises a question about human nature or the meaning of human experience. At times the author's theme may not confirm or agree with your own beliefs. Even then, if skillfully written, the work will still have a theme that illuminates some aspects of true human experience that may be comic or profound or unsurprising. When trying to identify theme ask the following questions:

- How has the main character changed?
- What lessons has he or she learned?
- What is the central conflict of the work?
- What is the subject of the work?
- What does the author say about the subject?
- Can this idea be supported entirely by evidence from the work itself?
- Are all the author's choices of plot, character, conflict, and tone controlled by this idea?